

Cleanup bill for Buxton mill is doubled



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Superfund Records Center
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BAR MILLS — The estimated cost of demolition and removal of hazardous chemicals at the Rogers Fibre Mill has jumped to \$2 million, due to the discovery of ground contamination at the site.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has demolished and removed all but the foundation of the 81-year-old mill from the site, which abuts the Saco River. However, the discovery of hazardous chemicals in the soil has more than doubled the expected costs of final cleanup, according to Janis K. Tsang, the EPA's on-site coordinator for the Superfund cleanup project.

“The project is just a lot more complicated than we originally estimated.

Janis Tsang,
EPA on-site coordinator

The EPA has identified a list of parties which are allegedly responsible for the contamination, Tsang said. Prominent on the list are the mill's owner, Patrick Canonica, and former parent company Lydall Eastern, Inc. While both parties are denying responsibility for the cleanup bill, Tsang said the EPA will finish the project, then take them to court for reimbursement.

Tsang said it is not uncommon for the cost of cleanup projects to increase after initial estimates are made.

“The project is just a lot more complicated than we originally estimated. We had taken some samples, but we often discover problems as we go along,” she said.

CONTAMINANTS

During the first phase of demolition last month, EPA workers discovered in the soil polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons and chromium, which are caustic, according to an Oct. 15 memo from Tsang.

Workers also discovered an as-yet-unidentified red dye substance, which appears to have entered the soil and water table of the river, according to the memo. The substance caused irritation to the skin of one EPA worker when it broke through his protective gear, and tests are being conducted to determine what the substance is, Tsang said.

The site also contains asbestos,

methylene chloride, carbon tetrachloride, benzene, copper, zinc and lead, all of which were expected before the project began, according to the memo.

Tsang said it is difficult to estimate the amount of contaminants that entered the river from the site. She said the EPA will have to bring in large machinery and excavate the contaminated soil. The amount of soil that needs to be removed has not yet been determined, which could also affect the cost of the project.

Tsang, who has been staying in Buxton since July to work on the project, said she hopes to have at

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least the excavation work completed before the onset of winter. The soil and asbestos are being taken to the Turnkey Landfill in New Hampshire.

It is largely because of the site's proximity to the river that the cleanup costs have doubled, Tsang said.

"We have to be very careful to stop anything from being released into the river, which takes time and can be expensive," she said.

The demolition project removed 45 cubic yards of asbestos-laden roofing material from the site, along with six 55-gallon drums of chemicals that had been sitting in the mill since it was closed in 1980, according to Tsang.

She said that demolition will remove the foundation of the building, which is contaminated. However, the section of the foundation that supports a Central Maine Power

dam at the site will not be removed, instead being decontaminated by the EPA, she said.

WHO'S PAYING?

The mill was started in 1917 and made fiberboard until 1980, when its manufacturing was discontinued.

Some businesses have operated at the site since that time, making it difficult for the EPA to sort out which businesses are responsible for the contamination and how much they should reimburse the EPA for the cleanup.

"Everybody is saying that somebody else contaminated the site," Tsang said Friday.

Lydall Eastern, Inc. owned the mill until 1984 and was the last company to use the building for manufacturing, Tsang said. The EPA had been negotiating with Lydall over the project, but the Connecticut-based manufacturing company officially denied responsibility on Thursday, she said.

Tsang said the EPA will not try to

determine which party was mostly responsible, instead notifying each of possible court action.

"The EPA is going to finish the project, then go to court with the PRPs (primary responsible parties)," she said.

The EPA has approved spending up to \$1.995 million on the project. Should the costs rise beyond this, Tsang said she would have to apply for a waiver to continue work.

THE BENEFITS

Buxton Selectman Bob Brandenstein, who worked to bring the EPA into the project, views the discovery of soil contamination as confirmation that the town was right not to demolish the building.

"If the town had gone ahead and taken that down, holy-moly, would that have been some trouble," he said Friday.

Brandenstein said he doesn't think the increased costs will affect the town, and he is happy to see the necessary cleanup work taking

place.

"I worked hard on it, and I am awful glad to see it come down," he said.

Before the EPA became involved, the town had received a \$10,000 community block grant to demolish the building. Brandenstein said the town will hold onto this money for now, in case further work is required at the site after the EPA completes the project.

"There is still going to be some possible need for the money after the EPA leaves," he said, adding that the grant is earmarked for the mill site.

Brandenstein said the site was hazardous to local youths who had repeatedly entered the decrepit building over the years.

"I had a police officer tell me that he was afraid to go into the building after some kids one time, which really said a lot to me about the dangers there," he said. "This was a hardened police officer."